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ON

MASONS' MARKS

FROM

OLD BUILDINGS IN THE NORTH-WEST
PROVINCES OF INDIA.

BY

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BENGAL CIVIL SERVICE,
C.I.E., M.R.A.S., F.S.A., &c.

REPRINTED FROM THE INDIAN ANTIQUARY.

MASONS' MARKS

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OLD BUILDINGS IN THE NORTH-WEST PROVINCES OF INDIA.

By H. RIVETT-CARNAC, Esq., Bengal Civil Service,
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The accompanying notes and sketches of masons' marks to be seen on stones of the ancient buildings of the districts through which I have marched during a recent tour may perhaps be of interest to some of your readers.

Without searching through the many volumes that have been written on Indian antiquities, to which I cannot refer whilst in camp, it is not easy to say whether these marks have ever been described or figured before. I may perhaps be going over the ground which in this respect has already been explored more carefully than I can pretend to attempt to do. But even if the work has been done before, the information may be contained in volumes to which all of your readers have not ready access, and the present notes may perhaps, therefore, be considered worthy of a place in the *Indian Antiquary*.¹

The subject has not, I am aware, escaped the attention of General Cunningham, of the Archaeological Survey of India. In his paper on the ruins of Sarnâth (published in the *Jour. As. Soc. Beng.* vol. xxxii.) the existence of these marks is noticed, and in his instructions to his Assistants (published in vol. III. of his *Reports*) is the following paragraph :—"The stones should also be carefully examined for masons' marks, which are seldom absent from old buildings, and which, if

¹ See a paper by Mr. Walhouse, *ante*, vol. IV. pp. 302-305.—ED.

numerous, will serve to give a tolerably complete alphabet of the characters in use when the structure was erected."

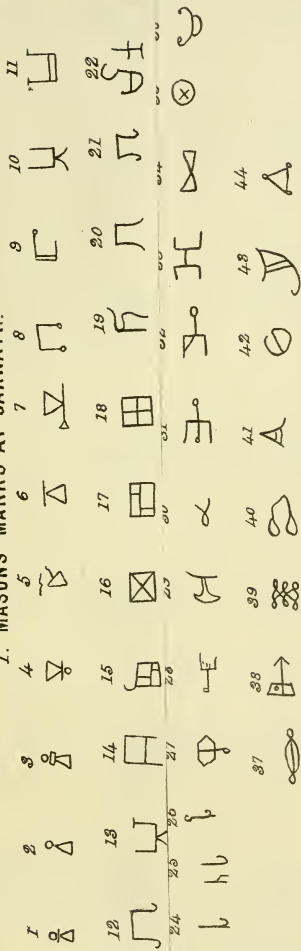
Sketches of the masons' marks are not, however, to be found in General Cunningham's account of Sarnâth above referred to, nor have I been able to find any notes or sketches of them in his well-known volume on the Bhilsa Topes, or in the published *Reports of the Archæological Survey*. Whilst marching about, I hope by degrees to qualify for the grade of Honorary Assistant to the Director General in his valuable efforts to collect information regarding all matters of antiquarian interest scattered over India. I have therefore observed his instructions, and now send you the result.

Masons' Marks at Sarnâth.

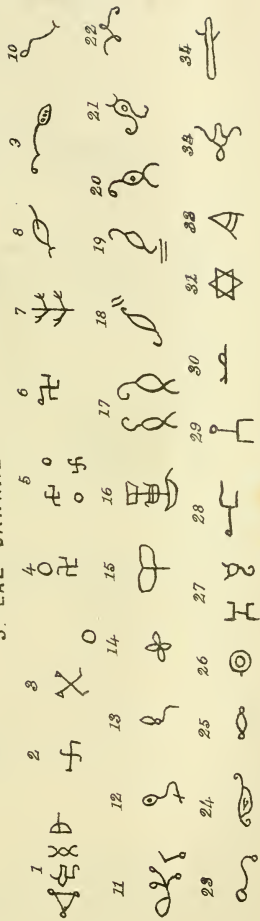
The first group of sketches on the accompanying plate contains some of the marks to be seen on the sandstone blocks of what is known as the "Dhamek Stûpa," at Sarnâth, near Banâras. These interesting remains have often been described, and chap. iii. of Fergusson's *History of Indian Architecture* contains two engravings of the stûpa.

Wilford, in *As. Res.* vol IX. quoted by Fergusson, gives the tradition that the stûpa was erected by the sons of Mohipâla, and destroyed or (as suggested by Fergusson) interrupted, by the Muhammadans in 1017, before its completion (*History of Indian Architecture*, p. 68). General Cunningham, on the other hand, infers from the characters of an inscription found within the stûpa that the building belongs to the sixth century of our era. Perhaps the marks, some of which appear to be letters similar to those of the Bhilsa inscriptions, may be of help in determining the question of the date of the work. The outer facing of the building has in many places been stripped off by decay, or by Muhammadan iconoclasts, leaving exposed the solid blocks of sandstone of which the lower part of the stûpa is built.

1. MASONS' MARKS AT SARNATH.



3. LÂL DARWÂZA MASJID.



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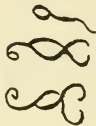
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It is on these inner blocks that the masons' marks, here figured, are found. Each stone has most probably on one of its sides a mark of some sort or other, made by the mason or the contractor, for ready recognition, after the stone was quarried or shaped. Only such marks as are on the outside faces of the stones exposed are to be seen; and those now noticed do not, perhaps, represent one-thousandth part of the marks on the stones composing the building. The same marks recur often, suggesting that the stones on which they are cut are the work of the same mason. The characters or symbols are generally about four inches in length, and from two or three inches in breadth. The sketches in the accompanying plate show them in the position in which they are seen *in situ*, but many of them were most probably inverted at the time the stones were placed in position. Thus Nos. 1 and 4 of the Sarnâth series are evidently the same symbol, one or other of which has been turned upside down.

A rough attempt has been made to group the marks according to classes: thus Nos. 1 to 7 show the triangle,² a favourite masons' mark, and one which can easily be cut with a chisel on soft sandstone. These marks are, if I remember right, the most common at Sarnâth.

The next group, comprising the marks from 8 to 18, consists of symbols formed of rectangles.³ In most of the remaining marks two symbols will be noticed, as indicating, perhaps, that two masons shared in the working of the stone.

The most noticeable of the marks are those figured at the commencement and at the end of the Sarnâth group (No. 1). Thus, Nos. 1 to 4 (No. 4 being No. 1 inverted) will be found to resemble the symbol of

² The Pâli letter ऋ.—ED.

³ No. 8 may possibly be ऋ, and No. 14, ऋ;—see vol. V. p. 304, plate, fig. 6.—ED.

Dharma given in Fig. 6, pl. 32 of Cunningham's *Bhilsa Topes*.

No. 49 is the well-known *svastika*, a favourite symbol on Buddhist remains. And here it may be noticed, *en parenthèse*, that M. Bertrand, the Director of the National Museum at St. Germain-en-Laye, recently sent me a model of a small altar found in the Pyrenees on which is the *svastika* exactly similar to No. 49.

No. 50 is probably intended to represent the Buddhist sacred tree; whilst No. 51 is perhaps meant for the platform and tree so common on Buddhist coins. On a visit lately to Âjudhiâ (Faizâbâd) I obtained a large number of these coins, the rough tree symbols of which bear a resemblance to the marks given at No. 51.

In Nos. 52 to 61 several of the letters found in old inscriptions will, I think, be recognized. Thus 52 and 53 are the *t* (turned sideways) of Aśoka's edicts, as given by Prinsep at p. 53, vol. II. of his *Essays on Indian Antiquities*, edited by Thomas. The second symbol of No. 54 is the *u* of the same alphabet.

No. 55 is also an *ñ* from the same plate of Prinsep. The first figure of No. 56 is *v*, but the symbol is inverted on the stone.

It may be noticed that this letter resembles the symbol of Mahâdeva to be seen drawn in many places in Banâras, and which Mr. Campbell of Islay found at Âjudhiâ—see *Jour. As. Soc. Beng.* January 1877. In a paper in the same journal, I have noticed the resemblance between this symbol and the marks found on many of the monoliths of Europe.*

No. 57 is the *u* of the alphabet of Aśoka's edicts (with the horizontal lines considerably lengthened) as given by Prinsep in the volume above quoted. No. 58 is the *j* used in what Prinsep calls the alphabet of the Western caves, but turned with the right side down.

* On Rock Markings in Kumaon.

No. 59, a rough cross, will be found figured in Prinsep, in one of his plates of the Manikyâla inscription and relics.

The triangle and upright, the last of the two symbols in No. 60, and the lower one,—the circle with a line through it—in No. 61, resembling the Greek ϕ , may both be found in the letters of the inscriptions given in the plates of Cunningham's *Bhilsa Topes*. Practised eyes, and readers who have other books of reference at hand, may perhaps be able to recognize other letters and symbols among the marks herein given.

A further and more careful examination would doubtless show many more marks on the stones of Sarnâth than I have been able to notice here. At Jaunpur, as will be seen from the other groups on the plate which accompanies this paper, the marks are much more elaborate and varied.

At Jaunpur.

From Banâras I marched to Jaunpur, and there I had an opportunity of examining and noting some of the masons' marks on the buildings for which the ancient capital of the Sharki kings is celebrated.

A description of these buildings, illustrated by plans and engravings, will be found in Fergusson's *Indian and Eastern Architecture*, book VII. chapter iv. ; and General Cunningham, in his *Archæological Reports*, vol. III., notices the "Jaunpuri Paṭhân" Architecture under his sixth group of the Muhammadan period.

The chief buildings now remaining are the fort (partly demolished), containing a small mosque and other buildings, a bridge which in 1871 withstood one of the most extraordinary floods on record, and the Jumâ' Atâlâ and Lâl Darwâzâ masjids.

The masons' marks figured in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th groups on the accompanying plates were found on the pillars and stones of the cloisters adjoining the masjids.

The peculiarity of these buildings is the mixture of two styles of architecture, Hindu and Muhammadan, regarding which Fergusson, at p. 520 of his work noticed above, remarks as follows:—"The principal parts of the mosques, such as the gateways, the great halls, and the western parts, generally are in a complete arcuate style. Wherever, indeed, wide openings and large internal spaces were wanted, arches and domes and radiating vaults were employed; and there is little in those parts to distinguish this architecture from that of the capitals. But in the cloisters that surround the courts, and in the galleries in the interior, short square pillars are as generally employed with bracket capitals, horizontal architraves, and roofs formed of flat slabs, as was invariably the case in Hindu and Jaina temples. Instead of being fused together, as they afterwards became, the arcuate style of the Moslems stands here, though in juxtaposition, in such marked contrast to the trabeate style of the Hindu, that some authors have been led to suppose that the pillared parts belonged to ancient Jaina or Buddhist monuments which had been appropriated by Muhammadans and converted to their purposes."

This view, Fergusson adds, was advanced by Baron Hugel, and has since found supporters in Mr. Horne (*Jour. As. Soc. Beng.* vol. XXXIV.), and in the Rev. Mr. Sherring in his *Sacred City of the Hindus*. Fergusson, although he admits that the Muhammadans may have utilized some Jaina or Hindu buildings, holds that at least nine-tenths of the pillars in the mosques were made at the time they were required for the places they now occupy. Cunningham, on the other hand, seems to differ from Fergusson on this point, and to support the views of Baron Hugel and his followers.

At page vi. vol. IV. of the *Archæological Reports*, General Cunningham refers to an inscription on one of the pillars of the Atâlâ Masjid, "which is known to have

been originally a Hindu temple converted to Muhammadan use by Ibrâhim Shâh Sharki between the years 1403-1440 A.D."

The masons' marks which I have now to notice may perhaps be of some use in determining the class of buildings to which the stones utilized by the Muhammadans for their mosques originally belonged.

Commencing with the marks on the Jumâ' Masjid (2nd group), I would draw attention to No. 1, in which I think may be recognized a rough representation of the Buddhist tree and platform, with the cobra erect to the right of the tree. These marks were noticed on a stone block built into the gateway of the Jumâ' Masjid. On the block a figure had been carved, but the carving had been partly defaced and the figure turned inwards.

In 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, also the Buddhist tree may, I think, be traced in the rude symbols. But 5, it is true, is not unlike the trident of Śiva, and the accompanying circle may perhaps be intended to represent a Mahâdeva. But I have, in the first instance, suggested the tree, as the conventional renderings of the tree on Buddhist coins obtained recently at Âjudhiâ are not unlike the markings here figured.

No. 7 is the *svastika* again, similar to the markings on the Buddhist Stûpa at Dhamek, Banâras. This symbol was, I understand, originally Buddhist, but was eventually adopted by the Hindus and Jains, so the stone may have been the work, I suppose, of either a Buddhist, a Hindu, or a Jain. In 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, may be recognized, I think, attempts to represent the cobra.

In No. 8 the cobras are intertwined in the well-known form of the *caduceus*, and cobras in this position are to be found carved on a stone at the Nâga (or Cobra) well at Banâras. In 8 and 9 the symbol has been turned upside-down, the original position of the stone having been altered on its being placed *in situ*.

The circles of 13, 14, 15, 16, and the symbol on the right-hand side in No. 8, represent perhaps the Mahâdeva and Yoni. In the double triangles of Nos. 17 and 18 will be recognized the favourite masons' mark, or Solomon's seal. The other marks do not call for special notice, save that there is apparently an absence of any attempt at written characters as opposed to symbols.

The tree and leaves or buds as in Nos. 19 to 23 are common enough. The only marks bearing any resemblance to letters are those of 24 to 27.

Taking next (*group 3*) the marks on the stones at the Lâl Darwâzâ Masjid, the most remarkable is the combination of symbol No. 1, in the third series,—the triangle,—then a spear-head, then the snakes intertwined, and lastly what would seem to be the representation of a bow and arrow. The *svastika* appears again in Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, the tree in No. 7. Nos. 8 to 15 seem to be intended for leaves or buds. No. 16 is quite a new symbol, of a somewhat elaborate type.

The stones of the Atâlâ Masjid are much richer in marks (*group 4*). But many of them are of types already noticed (see the second page of the plate).

The familiar triangle recurs in Nos. 1 to 4. No. 7 is undoubtedly intended for the snakes. No. 8, which I at first took to be intended for the same symbol, is perhaps meant for a bird.

A peculiar Buddhist symbol similar to that on many coins found at Âjudhiâ will be seen in the centre of Solomon's seal of No. 44. No. 30 is the sacred goose, perhaps.

In 39 will be seen the cobra surmounted by the Buddhist symbol noticed in the Dhamek markings.





